Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Validation Report of Expert Panel

Part 1   **General Information**

Provider: Hibernia College

Date of Visit: 19 June 2013

Programmes Submitted for Evaluation: Master of Arts in Primary Teaching
                                                   Master of Arts in Post Primary Teaching

Leading to award of: Master of Arts in Primary Teaching
                                                   Master of Arts in Post Primary Teaching

Programmes Recommended for Approval: Master of Arts in Primary Teaching
                                                   Master of Arts in Post Primary Teaching

Leading to award of: Master of Arts in Primary Teaching, Level 9,
                                                   120 ECTS
                                                   Master of Arts in Post Primary Teaching, Level 9
                                                   120 ECTS

Panel of Experts

Name	Area of Expertise	Organisation
Dr Brendan McCormack (Chair)	Registrar, Quality Assurance and Bologna Expert	Institute of Technology Sligo
Ms Anne Carpenter	Coordinator Teaching & Learning Centre	Institute of Technology Carlow
Dr James O'Higgins Norman	Senior Lecturer and Researcher, School of Education Studies, Chair of Professional Diploma in Education	Dublin City University
Mr David Howard	Head of School Partnerships, Primary education expert	Bradford College, UK
Mr Seamus Long	Former School Principal and former Central Executive Council member of INTO	Primary sector representative

Ms Patricia O'Brien	Education Support Officer, Co. Kildare VEC, former Principal of St. Farnan's Post Primary School	Post Primary sector representative
Ms Roisin Sweeney (Secretary)	Validation process	Manager, Programme Accreditation, QQI

Summary

The Expert Panel (the Panel), having reviewed the documentation presented by Hibernia College (the College) and considered the responses of the programme teams during the course of the evaluation meeting, will recommend approval of the proposed *Master of Arts in Primary Teaching* and the *Master of Arts in Post Primary Teaching* to QQI, when the conditions identified in the report have been satisfied. The Panel has also identified a number of recommendations which the programme teams should consider as the proposed programmes are revised.

The attached report addresses issues raised by the Panel in the context of the programme review. The general issues are common to both programmes and programme specific issues are then outlined.

Part 2 - Findings of the Panel

2.1 Introduction

Hibernia College is an online, higher education institution delivering web-based higher educational programmes. Since 2003 Hibernia College has had a range of programmes validated under HETAC processes. In the field of education, the College has a Higher Diploma in Arts in Primary Education, a Professional Diploma in Education and a Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning.

In early 2013 the College undertook a programmatic review of the programmes leading to the Higher Diploma in Arts in Primary Education and to the Professional Diploma in Education. Arising from that review and the influence of the Teaching Council of Ireland's requirements in relation to Initial Teacher Education, the College identified the need for new validation of the programmes in Primary Teaching and Post Primary Teaching. The College advised that the Teaching Council will only consider programmes that have been validated. Hibernia College submitted the programmes to QQI in April 2013 and they were assessed by the Panel in June 2013. The College plans to start delivery of the new programmes in the academic year 2014/2015.

2.2 Examination of the Programmes

2.2.1 General

The Panel met with management and staff from the College who were involved in the design of the programmes (See Appendix 1). They examined the programme submissions against the criteria for the validation of programmes as stipulated by HETAC in the document '*Core Validation Policy and Criteria (2010)*' and in the context of Section 84 of the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*. The Panel is supportive of the proposals and regard them as a positive development in terms of programme provision. During their discussions with College staff, the Panel identified a number of shortcomings in the current proposals, which must be addressed before the Panel can recommend approval of the programme to QQI.

The Panel met with management of the College who provided an outline and context for these two programmes and Hibernia College's approach to teaching and learning. For each programme a short presentation was made by the Programme Director covering the rationale for the programme and an overview of the virtual learning environment (VLE). The College is working within a blended learning approach combining an online, interactive system with on-site delivery in teaching centres around the country. The College's approach is to ensure programmes are of high quality and have appropriate access/entry requirements. It has adopted the CO-ACT model[i] which breaks the learning experience down into a five-stage process reflecting a progression from lower order towards higher order learning. All applicants deemed eligible for entry are interviewed to ensure the best quality learners gain access to the programmes.

Discussion also took place in relation to the demand for the programmes and the associated employment opportunities for graduates of the programmes. Management outlined that part of the rationale for the programmes is to fulfil future national requirements for teachers as well as immediate requirements. Research by the College using information from the Department of Education, the primary and post-primary unions, school patrons and the Teaching Council has shown that a growth in the supply of teacher numbers will be needed over the coming years. The Panel discussed the employment rate for graduates of the existing programmes and was advised that the vast majority gain employment after they graduate. The general profile of students at the College indicates that they are older, have a good network of contacts and use their teaching practice to progress into employment.

The Panel sought clarification as to why the College has proposed two level 9 programmes titled Masters, given that the Teaching Council does not refer to a specific level but to a series of expected learning outcomes. The College advised that it has an existing level 8 programme, the Higher Diploma in Arts in Primary Teaching which it had intended continuing with after programmatic review. However arising from the national and international research carried out by the College which informed the self- evaluation report on that programme, the College explained that there is a move on a national basis to place teacher education at level 9. This is reflected in nationally by other providers, including the University sector, of programmes in teacher training. Level 9 award standards make reference to more advanced practice as compared with Level 8 award standards. The College management outlined its views on the value of online learning as an accessible mode of delivery and the need for teachers to engage in continuous professional development.

The Panel queried whether there are resource implications in running two programmes at Master Level. Management advised that additional supports are required in relation to the capstone modules, research modules and supervision of practice. The College has put in place appropriate administration support and introduced Programme Managers for each of the proposed programmes.

The Panel queried whether the College has a staff development programme particularly as there is a shift towards delivering programmes at level 9 with the associated higher order knowledge, skills and competence and teaching methodologies. Management confirmed that each Programme Director carries out a needs analysis of their team, develops a schedule for staff development and there is a structure in place to progress this.

The panel sought clarification as to whether the school placement was at level 9 and if so, whether there is increased commitment by the host teacher/school to ensure that the student attains the level 9 standard. The Panel commented that there is a significant difference between level 8 and level 9 learning and noted that it was not clear from the documentation how this was achieved during the teaching practice.

The Panel queried how the College as an organisation handles the tension between delivering an academic model whilst driven by a business model. The management explained that they have achieved an appropriate balance; the College strives to maintain good quality programme provision while ensuring that it maintains economic viability in order to remain as a provider of education. Each Programme Director carries out an annual review of their programme, including the marketing of programmes and impact of delivery on student learning. The senior management strategy group noted that online learning has massive potential and the quality of provision is improving. Management advised that the College is very aware of the importance of these programmes to society, of the opportunities they provide for learners in non-urban areas to participate in learning and emphasised that the key to success is to ensure that committed and viable learners are recruited onto the programmes.

2.2.2 Protection of Enrolled Learners

Validation of a programme of education and training pursuant to Section 25 of the 2012 Act is subject to QQI being satisfied that the provider concerned has arrangements in place in accordance with QQI interim procedure on the Protection for Enrolled Learners.

2.2.3 Teaching and Learning

The Panel requested the College staff to outline the student experience and interaction. The College advised that students accepted onto programmes undergo an induction day where they meet the Programme Director, academic staff and administration staff. Students engage in a 3-week online induction programme which comprises academic induction, technical and online support and a health and well-being element. Students are grouped by geographic location. Each cohort has a dedicated programme administrator as a first point of contact who can direct any queries to appropriate academic, IT, library or counselling staff.

Post induction, students start the academic part of the programme. Each group of students has a module leader and a group tutor. The Programme Director delivers webinars[ii] on academic writing. The College further elaborated on the layers of contact between the College and the student which include a personalised weekly email alerting the student to tasks, tutorials and events occurring. It was noted that this approach is demanding on College staff but fruitful in terms of the level and type of supports available to learners. Measures are also in place to ensure consistency of delivery and assessment of subjects. One of the lead tutor's roles is to ensure tutors are consistent in the timing, content and feedback to learners.

The Panel raised a query on the monitoring of student attendance online. The College advised that attendance is monitored electronically. If a student has three absences from an online class or tutorial, an email is sent to the student to clarify reasons for the absences. To ensure student engagement with the programme, tutors will actively ask students questions to draw them into discussion and as a means of checking their knowledge. Tutors are trained to pick up different

'voices' in student's work to ensure content they submit is their own.

At an institutional level the College has a teaching, learning and assessment strategy. It ensures tutors get to know the students and their capabilities and determine if summative or formative assessment reflects the student's ability. There is a flag when students perform above or below expected the level.

The College advised that there are 20-25 students in a group depending on the location of the group. It was noted by the College that in subject-specific modules the numbers may be smaller. Students have tasks to complete in the course of a module and participation is monitored via COACT. The Panel asked whether tasks are not completed by students because they are not linked to assessment. The College advised that students can put the output of a task on a blog or podcast and as a result of this activity they are in effect building a portfolio. Students have been known to come together online outside of the College e.g. through the College online environment or through Facebook.

The Panel indicated that the total workload hours seem high at 30 hours per credit for what is effectively a part-time programme requiring a high level of commitment. The College responded that the programme is run over a calendar year rather than an academic year.

2.2.4 Programme specific elements:

2.2.4.1 Master of Arts Primary Teaching Programme

The panel acknowledged that the Teaching Council has set out requirements in relation to teacher education but that these are not relevant to the QQI programme validation process. What is of interest is the extent to which the College has stated the programme level outcomes to match level 9. The College advised that level 9 outcomes relate to leadership and working in ill-defined contexts. The staff explained that, in converting the existing level 8 programme to a level 9 programme, they raised the standard of the learning outcomes of the existing level 8 programme. They were informed by level 9 HETAC generic standards as to what a graduate should know and be able to do. The College acknowledged that there is now a greater demand for teachers to have level 9 skills and to be able to engage in self-reflective practice.

The panel observed that, in specifying the Masters level programme learning outcomes, the College also took guidance from the learning outcomes specified in the Teaching Council documentation. The panel advised that the programme learning outcomes need to be clearly based on the NFQ level 9 in the first instance and the minimum programme learning outcomes should be aligned to the knowledge, skill and competence sub strands at level 9. The panel also advised that the College needs to more clearly articulate the programme aims.

As regards the teaching and learning strategy, the panel advised that to comply with QQI programme validation requirements, there needs to be a clear statement regarding the assessment methodologies to be used and a mapping of assessment from programme level to module level outcomes.

2.2.4.2 Access to the programme

Applicants undergo a rigorous interview process. The panel queried whether there was a scoring system for the interview. The College advised that applicants first meet the academic requirements

for entry and then undertake an interview which is competency based. The interview is structured around the participant answering questions on five main areas: planning and preparation, communication skills, organisation, information technology skills and an interview in Irish.

The access requirement refers to a learner having experience in the sector. The panel indicated this may be somewhat limiting and recommended that it be amended to refer to working with children as that is broader and less limiting. The College indicated that it takes into account voluntary work such as with sports groups and after school activities.

The panel sought clarification on the supports available to students. In the first instance how the College determines student support needs and how does it deal with them if they arise. The College indicated that it endeavours to identify any such issues at the admission stage. It cannot force disclosure by individuals on any special needs they might have, but generally issues that arise may be identified through the administration team. If necessary, the College will ask for evidence from a consultant or counsellor. The College applies its policy on providing reasonable accommodation to students with special needs. In relation to the school placement phase of a programme, support issues may be identified only at that stage. The College ensures that students have a named support person and mentor to assist them. However, the student is also expected to inform the College of their needs and to implement strategies themselves (based, for example, on their previous experiences) to assist their learning.

There was some discussion on the alignment of the module learning outcomes to those of the level 9 programme and also to the particular requirements of the Primary School Curriculum. The panel recommended that the modules be mapped to the Primary School Curriculum core areas.

2.2.4.3 Modules:

Teaching Foundations

The Panel noted that this module covers a range from basic concepts to research and asked how students are assisted in understanding this. The College advised that it has rewritten the programme from level 8 to level 9 using its COACT model. This module is the first one students are exposed to. Through COACT there is an opportunity to develop skills in reflective work. Assessment is by case study which brings the learning from different course modules together. The panel noted that whilst the case study is interesting the research element associated with it is not evident and needs to be brought out.

The panel also noted that the decision to separate ethical and religious education may be somewhat problematic. The College advised that it will offer both. There was a discussion regarding external requirements for certification of religious education. The College currently provides appropriate certification and will do so for the purposes of ensuring students are eligible to apply for teaching posts in Catholic schools.

Assessment

The panel noted that it was not always clear what the assessment strategy/weighting is, what exactly is being assessed and whether learning outcomes are being demonstrated through the assessment. The College advised that primary education students need to do practicals. Students participate in the art, music and drama practicals during on-site days. The sports practicals are done in on-site classes in schools and during the Gaeltacht based on-site classes music etc. is also done in schools. The panel recommended that a further breakdown is given in relation to the hours assigned

to practicals and how much of it is carried out during on- site classes.

The panel also recommended that the programme documentation is clearer about how learning outcomes are being assessed i.e. what knowledge, skill and competence is being assessed.

Gaeilge

The panel discussed the College's approach to the Gaeilge module. The College advised that the Gaeilge module is mapped to the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFL) B1 level. At the access interview applicants are interviewed on a competency basis to assess fluency, accuracy, and communication skills. The College provides feedback to applicants if they need to improve. The panel queried how teaching of Irish is distributed throughout the two years of the programme. The College advised that it is spread throughout the course to allow students develop confidence and competence. This is then reinforced through the immersion courses that take place in the Gaeltacht.

Advanced School Experience

The panel commented that the programme documentation was unclear in respect of the responsibilities and roles of the host teacher. The College advised that it is the student who secures the placement. There is no formal process for quality assuring the suitability of the school to offer a placement. The student plans class material in advance and undertakes classroom management skills during that phase. The College provides virtual visit tutors who review the student's proposed material in advance, give feedback and advice on the placement. Students have a supervisor assigned for the placement and if necessary can also get a mentor supervisor.

In parallel to this the host school can contact Hibernia College at any time if necessary. Generally this is done through the placement supervisor. Hibernia College has a network of school partnership tutors around the country. The role of these tutors is to outline for the school how the placement will work. The co-operating teacher in the school does not assess the student. They provide feedback but this does not contribute to the student's grade. It can however influence the academic supervisor's final report on the placement.

The panel noted that the class teacher is observing the student but there is no formal process for them to give feedback on these observations. The College advised that this is in the process of being formalised and outlined the process for this becoming more formalised through a new initiative for class teachers to be trained as mentors. This is something that has developed out of the College's existing programmes and whilst it is still not a formal process the College will develop this further.

The panel noted that the placement seems very student dependent. The College advised that it may not have been well described in the programme documentation but students are monitored during the placement and can, if necessary, ask for a mentor. Equally the College will assign a mentor to the student if it feels it is necessary.

The panel also discussed the situation where students are excelling in placement and how to ensure that this is maintained. The College advised that students are assessed in five different areas: role and planning; teaching, learning and assessment; classroom management skills; ability to reflect and adapt.

Research project

The panel sought clarification on the role or involvement of the school to support the research. The

staff explained that, currently, the College communicates with the schools regarding the project but that the process is not yet formalised and the school does not have a role in the project. Once the student has identified the research topic the supervisor typically liaises with the school on this to ensure the student, where appropriate, can add value to the school through the research project. The College noted the significance of the on-site days for school placement in respect of planning and the integration of the experience into other aspects of the student's learning.

2.2.5 Master of Arts in Post Primary Teaching Programme

Modules:

Foundations of Education

The panel asked how the transition from the academic learning to the school environment is assessed. The College advised that a case study is given which integrates assessment across four modules. The panel acknowledged the value to students of integrating disciplines but asked how this was managed from a staff perspective. The College advised that staff involved in each of the modules summarise the content of their modules and this is circulated to the other staff teaching on the programme. They then come together and discuss the content of the whole programme.

Core Teaching Methodologies

The Panel asked what subject areas the College decided to leave out in this module. The College responded that given the changes that are happening in the post primary curriculum there was a need for a generic module that can be further developed as new learning requirements are introduced. The emphasis in this module is on teaching people to learn. The panel further questioned what the College has identified as key skills. The College outlined that the focus is on developing the students ability to design, generate and use curriculum. In relation to teaching methodologies, the focus is on developing the ability of the student as a teacher rather than on subject specific teaching methodologies. The panel queried whether, with the impending changes to the Junior Certificate, facilitation skills are included. The College confirmed that foundation skills are included, as the teacher of the future will need to be able to act as facilitator – the College expressed the view that this module set the Hibernia College programme apart from other equivalent programmes and gives students a competitive advantage. During this module, students develop an e-portfolio that they can bring with them throughout their learning experience and into the workplace. The portfolio is a combination of artefacts, graphics, texts, resources and reflective pieces that they develop. The panel advised that there should be greater clarity in the programme document on the expected content and application of the e-portfolio.

Teaching Subject Mastery

The panel noted that this is an interesting subject that is not on other similar programmes. The College outlined that the context for this module has evolved. Feedback from current post graduate students has indicated that knowledge of their own subject specific area is not necessarily at teaching of curriculum level. They indicated that there is a requirement to improve on mastery of the 2nd level curriculum in the subject. The students utilise a self- diagnostic tool which helps them establish where they are and what gaps need to be filled with the help of a tutor. The College further advised that the module has been written with reference to defined subject pillars. Students are required to do two methodologies to meet Teaching Council requirements.

On the wider programme context the panel queried whether the College had considered offering electives rather than making all modules mandatory. The College clarified that the student can be elective in their choice of research project topic.

Teaching Methodologies 1 & 2

The panel had no particular issues or queries on this module.

School Experience and Professional Practice

The panel asked that the College elaborate on how this aspect of the programme works and is graded. The College advised that each student has a mentor teacher in the school who is trained by Hibernia College in that role. That teacher may be in the student's specific subject area or outside of it as it depends on the particular school. The College outlined how the module is focused on professional practice as well as on teaching practice i.e. to help the student understand the range of influences in school life and how to work as a teacher. When a student identifies a school for their placement, a representative from the College visits the school to assess the suitability of the placement in achieving the module learning outcomes. Typically, they discuss with the school Principal how the placement will work. Students are encouraged to experience how different teachers deliver classes as well as their own. The student has to reflect each day on what they have learned and to express their thoughts on the experience. The e-portfolio reflects the daily experiences and teaching experiences and is monitored by the student's supervisor. The panel sought information on how the assessment of the placement is weighted and was advised that marks are apportioned based on the visits by the academic supervisor. The School Experience module must be passed. The College also confirmed that competencies are progressively developed between placements through online delivery and the on-site classes.

The panel asked what the criteria for passing the placement element are. Students are required to demonstrate they have achieved the learning outcomes. This is done through observation of the student and assessment of their e-portfolio. There are grade descriptors used in marking students.

The panel also asked whether students are encouraged to self-assess. It is not currently part of the process. The panel also clarified whether action planning is utilised, for example to help set future targets. The College advised that there are progress points along the way at which students get written feedback from tutors, with guidelines for future learning.

Research Methods

The panel queried the ethical aspects of carrying out research in a school placement and whether there is a process in place to manage this. The College advised that all proposals go to an internal ethics committee for approval. The College also consults with school management on this to explain that the research can be of benefit for the school and to explore opportunities for such benefits. The College advised that it has learned from other programmes it has run and that module leaders and project supervisors play a role in the discussions with the placement school. The panel queried why, in the documentation, research skills are linked to behavioural aspects. The College advised that pupil behaviour provides many opportunities for research activity. Teachers are already dealing with special education needs. The College insists that the research must cover some aspect of special education needs. It had questioned this in the past but evidence has shown that such a focus significantly enhances the learning. Also such research may offer the opportunity to advocate for a specific pupil's condition and can bring real benefits to, and improve the school situation for a child.

Developing the professional teacher

This module has developed over time and is influenced by the experience of placement in diverse environments. It allows for exposure to a number of areas and helps instil in students awareness of the professional responsibilities of the teacher.

The College also outlined the role of the mentor tutors in the context of the development of the faculty. The College advertises for tutors when needed. Applicants are interviewed on professional capabilities. Once selected they undergo online training as a tutor and also undertake on-site training as required by the College e.g. using a case study approach. This is seen as a form of continuous professional development (CPD). A link has been developed with University of Plymouth with the potential for staff to engage in collaborative projects. . The College also outlined that it is involved in national professional networks at staff and organisational levels.

Part 3 Recommendation

The panel of experts recommend the validation of the programme:

> **Master of Arts in Primary Education**
>
> **Master of Arts in Post Primary Education**

for the purposes of the award of:

> **Master of Arts in Primary Education, Level 9 (120 ECTS)**
>
> **Master of Arts in Post Primary Education, Level 9 (120 ECTS)**

Subject to:
QQI's general conditions of approval under Section 84 Transition and Savings Provision, 2012 Act.

3.1 Conditions

The College must:

C1:   specify, for each programme, the overarching programme aims.

C2:   clearly align, for each programme, the Minimum Programme Learning Outcomes (MPLO) with the Level 9 Knowledge, Skills and Competence strands and sub strands of the National Framework of Qualifications

C3:   map, within each programme, the programme and module learning outcomes to the assessment techniques

3.2 Recommendations

The College is advised to:

R1:   consider the title of each programme with reference to nationally agreed norms when known and in accordance with QQI titling convention

R2:   consider including Level 9 enquiry based learning outcomes in each module where possible

R3:   consider making student self-evaluation more explicit within the Advanced SEPP and Major Project modules in each programme

R4:   consider revising the programme modules to give more clarity in relation to specific assessment techniques and associated weightings

R5:   elaborate, within each set of programme documents, the approach to blended learning with specific reference to on-site delivery

R6:   provide, for each programme, detailed guidelines for the school placement and for the research project

R7:   reconsider, within the Master of Arts in Primary Education programme, a broad approach to ethical and religious teaching to ensure that the widest opportunity for graduate employment is maintained graduate employment is maintained

Appendix 1: Hibernia College Staff

Management
Seán Rowland (President)
Sara McDonnell (Executive Vice President)
Nicholas Breakwell (Executive Dean)
Naomi Jackson (Registrar)
Professor Tom Mitchell (Academic Chairman)

Post Primary
Core staff present
Melanie Ní Dhuinn (Programme Director)
Elaine Ní Neachtain (Deputy Programme Director)
Mary Dowling Maher (Director of School Partnerships)
Allison McKay (Programme Manager)
Aline Courtois (Author/ Lead tutor)
Anne Breen (Tutor/ SEPP supervisor)
Brendan Duane (Author/Lead tutor)
Carmel Nic Eoin (Author/Lead tutor)
Catherine Gralton (School Partnership Liaison Associate/ SEPP supervisor)
Conor Reale (Author/ Lead tutor)
David King (tutor)
Elaine Mullins (Author/Lead tutor)
Frank McCarrick (tutor/ SEPP supervisor)
Gary McConway (Lead tutor)
John Gavin SEPP (author/SEPP tutor)
Maura Clancy (School Partnership Coordinator)
Nicholas Cuddihy (Author/SEPP tutor)
Sinéad O'Hara (Lead tutor)
Tom Hughes (School Partnership team Liaison associate/SEPP supervisor)
Tony Power (tutor/SEPP supervisor)
Valerie McCormick (School Partnership Liaison associate/SEPP supervisor)

Primary
Core staff present
Siobhán Cahillane-McGovern (Programme Director)
Mary Kelly (Deputy Programme Director)
Bríd O'Connell (Programme Manager)
Anna Davitt (Head of Irish)
Dr. Fintan McCutcheon (module leader)
Dr. Marian Farrelly (module leader)
Hilary Roche, (school partnership tutor)
Bernadette Stapleton (school partnership tutor)
Dr. Jim Kavanagh (school partnership tutor)
Mary McDonald (school partnership tutor)
Veronica Molloy (school partnership tutor)
Fiona Thomas (Lead tutor)
Jacqueline Skelly (Lead tutor)

Shared staff list
Audrey Geraghty (Librarian)
Deirdre McGrath (Knowledge Manager)
Liam Tracey (QA Officer)
Natalie McNulty (Academic Development Officer)
Paula Hesketh (Examination's Officer)
Sarah Haugh (Professional Practice Co-ordinator)
Sarah Dundon (Programme Administrator)

Orla Bolger (Admission's Team Leader)
Amy Campbell (Admission's Administrator)
Emma Corrigan (Programme Administrator)
Sinead Chaplin (Programme Administrator)
Aedín Whelan (Programme Administrator)
Laura Glynn (Admission's Administrator)

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[i] COACT Model: a theoretical framework that forms the basis of lesson design and structure
[ii] A lecture or workshop transmitted over the world wide web